

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
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FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9913
INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA
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AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
DEA WASHDC
USCINCSO J2 QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, BL
SUBJECT: SILES ZUAZO MEETS THE PRESS

1. ON MARCH 15, FORMER PRESIDENT AND MNRI PARTY CHIEF HERNAN SILES ZUAZO GAVE HIS FIRST FORMAL PRESS CONFERENCE SINCE RETURNING FROM EXILE TWO AND ONE-HALF WEEKS EARLIER. FLANKED BY REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MIR, THE SOCIALIST PARTY (PS), AND THE MOSCOW-LINE COMMUNISTS, SILES READ A PREPARED STATEMENT THAT CALLED FOR THE FORMATION OF A BROAD CIVIL FRONT TO DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF THE BOLIVIAN PEOPLE AND TO LEAD THEM BACK TO PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY. ACCORDING TO SILES, THE REVOLUTIONARY PROCESS INITIATED IN 1952 HAD TOTALLY DISINTEGRATED, A DEVELOPMENT HE ATTRIBUTED TO THE PROVOCATIONS OF "IMPERIALISM." HE STATED THAT THE NEW OPPOSITION FRONT WOULD BE FORMED INITIALLY BY THE MNRI AND THE MIR, BUT WOULD BE EXPANDED LATER TO INCLUDE OTHER PARTIES OF THE LEFT.

2. IN RESPONSE TO REPORTERS' QUESTIONS, SILES SAID THAT "IF THERE WERE NO OTHER POSSIBILITY," HE WOULD BE THE FRONT'S
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PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. ASKED WHY HE WOULD AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN AN ELECTORAL PROCESS HE HAD EARLIER CHARACTERIZED AS FRAUDULENT, SILES REMARKED THAT "EVEN FRAUD HAS ITS LIMITS," POINTING OUT THAT THE MNR WON THE 1951 ELECTIONS EVEN THOUGH IT WAS IN THE OPPOSITION. SILES ALSO:

--EXPRESSED SYMPATHY FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY OF FORMER

DEFENSE MINISTER RENE BERNAL ESCALANTE, BUT SAID THE "PEOPLE MUST ULTIMATELY DECIDE;"

--CHARACTERIZED THE EXTERNAL DEBT INCURRED BY THE BANZER ADMINISTRATION AS "UNPRECEDENTED," ESTIMATING THAT IT CONSTITUTED 70 PERCENT OF BOLIVIA'S GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT; AND

--UNDERScoreD THE IMPORTANCE OF CONDUCTING THE SEA-OUTLET NEGOTIATIONS WITHIN A TRI-PARTITE FRAMEWORK (I.E. WITH PERU, AS WELL AS CHILE).

3. INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, SILES WAS APPARENTLY SILENT ON THE US DECISION TO PERMIT THE SALE OF GSA TIN (PERHAPS BECAUSE HE WANTED TO AVOID HELPING TO CREATE A SCAPEGOAT FOR THE BANZER GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES). HOWEVER, WE UNDERSTAND HIS GROUP PLANS TO TRY TO ORGANIZE A PROTEST RALLY AGAINST THE US TIN ANNOUNCEMENT NEXT WEEK.

4. COMMENT: AN MNRI OFFICIAL HAS TOLD US THAT SILES' PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY WILL PROBABLY BE DECLARED OFFICIALLY WITHIN THE NEXT FEW DAYS. HE SAID THAT IN ADDITION TO THE MNRI AND THE MIR THE SILES FRONT WOULD INCLUDE THE PS AND THE MUSCOVITE COMMUNISTS, BUT WOULD BE "OPEN AT BOTH ENDS". HE THOUGHT IT MIGHT ATTRACT PARTIES AS FAR RIGHT AS THE PDC AND AS FAR LEFT AS JUAN LECHIN OQUENDO'S PRIN. WITH RESPECT TO THE LATTER, HOWEVER, HE COMMENTED THAT LECHIN HAS THUS FAR BEEN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RELUCTANT TO DISASSOCIATE HIMSELF FROM EXTREME LEFT GROUPS LIKE THE POR, WHICH, HE IMPLIED, WOULD NOT BE WELCOME IN THE SILES ZUAZO CAMP. AS FOR SILES' EXPRESSION OF SYMPATHY FOR THE BERNAL CANDIDACY, THE OFFICIAL SAID THIS WAS MERELY A POLITICALLY ASTUTE ATTEMPT TO WEAKEN SUPPORT FOR PEREDA. BOEKER

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